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Positive Behavior Support Systems:

Value Added from Use of the School Wide Information System

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Abstract

Purpose: School Wide Positive Behavior Support (SWPBS) involves four systems: (a) School-Wide System; (b) Non-Classroom Setting System; (c) Classroom System; and (d) Individual Student System. Staff use a self-assessment survey to make decisions about implementation status and priority for improvement for 46 recommended features. Schools also may use the online School Wide Information System (SWIS) to manage discipline data. These questions were addressed: Is SWPBS implementation enhanced by also using SWIS? In assessing how well they are implementing SWPBS, do administrators and teachers agree on areas in need of improvement and if so, which areas are in need of improvement?

Research Design: A descriptive analysis of the Staff Self-Assessment Survey of Positive Behavior Support examined responses from 30,303 individuals from 1012 schools.

Findings: SWIS schools had higher implementation scores than Non-SWIS schools on 94% of the School Wide features, 89% of the Non-Classroom features, 73% of the Classroom features, and 50% of the Individual Student features. Administrators assigned higher priorities for improvement to most features than teachers did but both found a need to improve behavior support teams and opportunities for families.

Implications for Research and Practice: Using SWIS and SWPBS may facilitate implementation of School Wide, Non-Classroom, and Classroom Systems. The Individual Student System is in need of improvement in SWIS and non-SWIS schools. The Staff Self-Assessment Survey is useful for identifying local priorities for improvement.

Key Words: School discipline, positive behavior support, school improvement, administrators and teachers, online surveys and data management

A recent issue of the *Journal of Special Education Leadership* carried three articles related to the urgency of the need for more effective positive behavior support systems in inclusive schools that serve students in both special and general education. Zirkel (2006) explained how the new causality criteria for manifestation determinations as a result of IDEA 2004 may lead to an increase in the number of special education students who are excluded. This is in agreement with findings of a recent review of State Performance Plans (SPP) which indicated that rates of expulsion and long term suspensions for students with disabilities were on the rise in states that were actively training school administrators on legal aspects of manifestation determinations (Tobin, Sugai, & Meyers, 2006). However, the report found that most states preferred an emphasis on increased training in the use of School Wide Positive Behavior Support as a means to decrease disciplinary exclusions of special education students. In addition, many state reports indicated a need to improve methods of collecting and using data on disciplinary events. The SPPs' emphasis on providing training in positive methods of behavior support appears to be highly relevant, given the report by Rozalski, Yell, & Boreson (2006), that "despite controversy . . . seclusion timeout and physical restraints are frequently used in public schools" (p. 13). Shepherd (2006) highlighted key elements of positive methods of supporting students being implemented in Vermont: (a) preventive approaches made possible when teachers are assisted by "multidisciplinary problem-solving teams designed to support students with academic and behavioral challenges" (p. 30), (b) active involvement of school principals as team members, and (c) data-based decision-making combined with a Response to Intervention (RTI)

approach to strategies used for support. The procedures described by Shepherd have much in common with School Wide Positive Behavior Support (SWPBS, Bohanon-Edmonson, Flannery, Eber, & Sugai, 2005; Sprague & Horner, 2006; Sugai & Horner, 2002; Sugai, Horner, Lewis-Palmer, & Todd, 2005; Walker et al., 1996).

In the SWPBS approach to support of all students, four systems are to be developed: (a) School-Wide System; (b) Non-Classroom Setting System; (c) Classroom System; and (d) Individual Student System. The first three systems are all universal interventions and intentionally similar in many ways. Implementation of the first three systems is highly correlated (Tobin, in review). However, focusing on each one separately in staff development and monitoring efforts is a practical way to get across all the elements needed in each area. The Individual Student System can be thought of within a Response to Intervention framework in that, when students with challenging behaviors need more support than universal interventions can provide, organized procedures and resources are ready to meet that challenge even if a unique need arises (Crone, Horner, & Hawken, 2004). The Individual System is different from the first three systems in another way also: schools need district support and resources for individual students with exceptionally high needs (Lewis-Palmer, Bounds, & Sugai, 2004). In developing a systematic approach, school and district personnel plan in advance what steps will be taken when a problem-solving effort is needed.

Another aspect of SWPBS, which runs across all four systems, is an emphasis on data-based decision-making. Many of the schools that are developing the four PBS systems also are using an online tool, the School Wide Information System (SWIS, see <http://www.swis.org>) for ready access to discipline data, whether at whole school, specific setting, grade level, or individual student level. Also, schools are able to have staff self-assess how well implementation

is going by taking an online PBS Survey designed to measure the extent to which each of the four systems in “in place” (<http://www.pbssurveys.org/pages/SelfAssessmentSurvey.aspx>).

Originally published as the “Effective Behavior Support (EBS) Survey” (Lewis & Sugai, 1999), it also is available for downloading at the website of the Institute on Violence and Destructive Behavior (http://www.uoregon.edu/~ivdb/doc/resources_links/comb_ass_survey.pdf). The purpose of this paper is to report a study of online responses to the PBS Survey between 2004 and 2006 that provided information on specific elements within each of the four SWPBS systems.

Characteristics of Schools and Respondents

Information on demographic characteristics, such as race and ethnicity or free and reduced lunches, was not collected for this analysis. However, responses to the PBS Survey came from 30,303 individuals from 1012 schools from across the United States, all evidently interested in how well all four positive behavior support systems within the SWPBS approach were being implemented in their school. The set of schools using both SWPBS and SWIS, included schools in Colorado, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, New Hampshire, New Mexico, North Dakota, Ohio, Oregon, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Washington, and with the Bureau of Indian Affairs. The set of schools using SWPBS but not SWIS included schools in Colorado, Connecticut, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Missouri, New Hampshire, New Mexico, North Dakota, Ohio, Oregon, Rhode Island, South Carolina, and Virginia. Elementary, middle, and high schools participated, with the SWIS set including slightly more elementary schools than the Non-SWIS set (Table 1).

Table 1

Highest Grade Level Served in the Schools

	SWIS	Non-SWIS
Highest Grade	(n = 596)	(n = 416)
< 5 th	10%	4%
5 th	33%	30%
6 th	19%	23%
7 th	1%	0%
8 th	24%	23%
> 8 th	13%	20%
Total	100%	100%

Most (72.53%) of these online surveys were completed in 2005. In 2006, 26.78% were completed. Less than 1% of the surveys in this study were completed in 2004. The PBS Staff Self Assessment Survey was being used in 2004 (and earlier) but the data available at the time of this study, in a format making analysis of specific items within each system scale possible, consisted primarily of surveys completed in 2005 and 2006.

The total number of individuals responding to the survey was 30,303. Of these, 106 did not list their occupation (62 from SWIS schools and 42 from Non-SWIS schools). The distributions were similar for both sets of schools, with the majority of respondents (60%) in both sets listing their occupation as “teacher” (Table 2).

Table 2

Occupations Listed by PBS Survey Respondents

	SWIS	Non-SWIS
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	(n = 16,432)	(n = 13,765)
Administrator	3.63%	3.65%
Teacher	60.17%	60.34%
Community member	0.11%	0.09%
Other	8.47%	8.85%
Educational assistant	11.26%	11.37%
General educator	5.24%	3.78%
Counselor	2.53%	2.48%
Parent/family member	0.41%	0.32%
School psychologist	0.82%	0.61%
Special educator	7.36%	8.51%
Total	100.00%	100.00%

Four PBS Systems “In Place” Status and Value Added by SWIS Use

The origins of the PBS Survey are directly connected to staff development, particularly in the introducing this approach to a school. It was designed to help school staff recognize their strengths, needs, and priorities. Response options for each item include (a) evaluation of the implementation status of the feature (“in place” or “partially in place” or “not in place”) and (b) decisions about the priority for taking action now to improve this aspect (high, medium, or low). For analysis, a 3-point scale of 0 (for “not in place” and “low” priority) to 2 (for “in place” and “high” priority) is used. For formative evaluation of implementation efforts, the goal is an average score of 1.51 or higher, which is a benchmark for considering that an item is perceived as “in place” by a majority of the respondents. An average score of 1.51 or higher on priority

would indicate that staff “buy in” for improvements efforts is likely for that item. Many schools will use the survey to select a system to address first, often the school-wide system, and then, within that system, three features to focus on improving. It is recommended that all staff take the survey although sometimes only PBS team members respond. In this section, average implementation status scores of SWIS and Non-SWIS schools were studied for each system.

School Wide System

The School Wide System has 18 features:

1. A small number (e.g. 3-5) of positively and clearly stated student expectations or rules are defined.
2. Expected student behaviors are taught directly.
3. Expected student behaviors are rewarded regularly.
4. Problem behaviors (failure to meet expected student behaviors) are defined clearly.
5. Consequences for problem behaviors are defined clearly.
6. Distinctions between office vs. classroom managed problem behaviors are clear.
7. Options exist to allow classroom instruction to continue when problem behavior occurs.
8. Procedures are in place to address emergency/dangerous situations.
9. A team exists for behavior support planning and problem solving.
10. School administrator is an active participant on the behavior support team.
11. Data on problem behavior patterns are collected and summarized within an on-going system.
12. Patterns of student problem behavior are reported to teams and faculty for active decision-making on a regular basis (e.g. monthly).
13. School has formal strategies for informing families about expected student behaviors at

school.

14. Booster training activities for students are developed, modified, and conducted based on school data.

15. School-wide behavior support team has a budget for (a) teaching students, (b) on-going rewards, and (c) annual staff planning.

16. All staff are involved directly and/or indirectly in school-wide interventions.

17. The school team has access to on-going training and support from district personnel.

18. The school is required by the district to report on the social climate, discipline level or student behavior at least annually.

On 17 of these 18 features (94%), SWIS schools had higher implementation scores than Non-SWIS schools (Figure 1). The average score surpassed 1.50 for six of the features (1, 2, 8, 9, 10, and 18) for SWIS schools and for three for Non-SWIS schools (1, 8, and 10).

< Insert Figure 1 about here. >

Non-Classroom Setting System

Hallways and playgrounds are examples of “non-classroom settings.” The Non-Classroom Setting System has nine features:

1. School-wide expected student behaviors apply to non-classroom settings.
2. School-wide expected student behaviors are taught in non-classroom settings.
3. Supervisors actively supervise (move, scan, and interact) students in non-classroom settings.
4. Rewards exist for meeting expected student behaviors in non-classroom settings.
5. Physical/architectural features are modified to limit (a) unsupervised settings, (b) unclear traffic patterns, and (c) inappropriate access to and exit from school grounds.
6. Scheduling of student movement ensures appropriate numbers of students in non-classroom

spaces.

7. Staff receives regular opportunities for developing and improving active supervision skills.
8. Status of student behavior and management practices are evaluated quarterly from data.
9. All staff are involved directly or indirectly in management of non-classroom settings.

On 8 of these 9 features (89%), SWIS schools had higher implementation scores than Non-SWIS schools (Figure 2). The average score surpassed 1.50 for only the first feature for both sets of schools.

< Insert Figure 2 about here. >

Classroom System

The Classroom System has eleven features:

1. Expected student behavior and routines in classrooms are stated positively and defined clearly.
2. Problem behaviors are defined clearly.
3. Expected student behavior and routines in classrooms are taught directly.
4. Expected student behaviors are acknowledged regularly (positively reinforced) (>4 positives to 1 negative).
5. Problem behaviors receive consistent consequences.
6. Procedures for expected and problem behaviors are consistent with school-wide procedures.
7. Classroom-based options exist to allow classroom instruction to continue when problem behavior occurs.
8. Instruction and curriculum materials are matched to student ability (math, reading, language).
9. Students experience high rates of academic success ($\geq 75\%$ correct).
10. Teachers have regular opportunities for access to assistance and recommendations (observation, instruction, and coaching).

11. Transitions between instructional and non-instructional activities are efficient and orderly.

On 8 of these 11 features (73%), SWIS schools had higher implementation scores than Non-SWIS schools (Figure 3). The average score surpassed 1.50 for four features (1, 2, 3, and 8) for both sets of schools.

< Insert Figure 3 about here. >

Individual Student System

The Individual Student System involves the provision of extra support, typically targeted or intensive and individualized interventions, to students for whom the first three universal systems are insufficient. The Individual Student System has eight elements:

1. Assessments are conducted regularly to identify students with chronic problem behaviors.
2. A simple process exists for teachers to request assistance.
3. A behavior support team responds promptly (within 2 working days) to students who present chronic problem behaviors.
4. Behavioral support team includes an individual skilled at conducting functional behavioral assessment.
5. Local resources are used to conduct functional assessment-based behavior support planning (~10 hrs/week/student).
6. Significant family and/or community members are involved when appropriate and possible.
7. School includes formal opportunities for families to receive training on behavioral support/positive parenting strategies.
8. Behavior is monitored and feedback provided regularly to the behavior support team and relevant staff.

On 4 of these 8 features (50%), SWIS schools had higher implementation scores than

Non-SWIS schools (Figure 4). Neither set of schools surpassed 1.50 for any Individual Student System features.

< Insert Figure 4 about here. >

Which Features Have the Highest Priority for Improvement?

Although all of the features for all of the systems are recommended, school staff members do not place equal priority for improvement (PFI) on all features. To evaluate and summarize PFI scores on the PBS Survey, average scores of all Administrators (n = 1099) and all Teachers (n = 18,193) were charted for each system: School Wide (Figure 5), Non-classroom (Figure 6), Classroom (Figure 7), and Individual Student (Figure 8). Just as a implementation score of 1.51 or higher was needed in Figures 1 – 4 for a feature to be considered “in place” by a majority of respondents, a PFI score of 1.51 or higher is needed for a feature to be considered a “high” priority for improvement by a majority of respondents.

< Insert Figures 5, 6, 7, and 8 about here. >

No feature in any system had an average PFI score of 1.51 or higher for either administrators or for teachers, even though many features were not considered to be “in place.” However, some features had higher PFI scores than others. To identify features where improvement efforts would be likely to be supported by both administrators and teachers, the PFI scores of Administrators and Teachers were summed and rank ordered. Features with a combined score higher than 2.25 are shown in Table 3. The top 14 features considered most in need of improvement according to the combined average PFI score for Administrators and Teachers were:

1. A behavior support team responds promptly (within 2 working days) to students who present chronic problem behaviors. (Individual #3)

2. School includes formal opportunities for families to receive training on behavioral support/positive parenting strategies. (Individual #7)
3. Students experience high rates of academic success ($\geq 75\%$ correct). (Classroom #9)
4. Assessments are conducted regularly to identify students with chronic problem behaviors. (Individual #1)
5. Distinctions between office vs. classroom managed problem behaviors are clear. (School Wide #6)
6. Consequences for problem behaviors are defined clearly. (School Wide #5)
7. Problem behaviors receive consistent consequences. (Classroom #5)
8. Expected student behaviors are taught directly. (School Wide #2)
9. Behavior is monitored and feedback provided regularly to the behavior support team and relevant staff. (Individual #8)
10. Problem behaviors (failure to meet expected student behaviors) are defined clearly. (School Wide #4)
11. Patterns of student problem behavior are reported to teams and faculty for active decision-making on a regular basis (e.g. monthly). (School Wide #12)
12. Expected student behaviors are acknowledged regularly (positively reinforced) (>4 positives to 1 negative). (Classroom #4)
13. Booster training activities for students are developed, modified, and conducted based on school data. (School Wide #14)
14. School-wide expected student behaviors are taught in non-classroom settings. (Non-classroom, #2)

Table 3

Features Ranked by Sum of Administrator' and Teachers' Priority for Improvement Scores

Rank	System	Feature #	Administrators	Teachers	Sum
1st	Individual	3	1.36	1.30	2.66
2nd	Individual	7	1.30	1.31	2.61
3rd	Classroom	9	1.33	1.18	2.51
4th	Individual	1	1.28	1.21	2.49
5th	School Wide	6	1.30	1.16	2.46
6th	School Wide	5	1.11	1.30	2.41
7th	Classroom	5	1.18	1.22	2.40
8th	School Wide	2	1.31	1.08	2.39
9th	Individual	8	1.25	1.14	2.39
10th	School Wide	4	1.14	1.18	2.32
11th	School Wide	12	1.24	1.08	2.32
12th	Classroom	4	1.32	0.99	2.31
13th	School Wide	14	1.24	1.06	2.30
14th	Non-Classroom	2	1.19	1.09	2.28

Average scores for *priority for improvement* (PFI) were lower than expected, given the average implementation status scores. A low PFI score does not necessarily mean that a feature is considered unimportant. At least five interpretations should be investigated locally: First, it may be that the feature is already being implemented well and improvement is not needed. Second, if a feature has a low implementation score and a low PFI score, perhaps it is not important. Third, if the feature is important to policy makers, staff training may be needed on why the feature is important. Fourth, the feature may be recognized as important but other, even

more important features must be given top priority. Fifth, the feature may be known to be important but the effort needed to improve its implementation would be so great or so aversive that staff are not willing to rank it as a high priority. If this is the situation, school leaders should meet with staff for brainstorming and problem-solving discussions to find innovative ways to improve implementation without putting an unacceptable burden on staff.

In conclusion, results suggest that schools using SWIS to manage discipline referral data online are more successful at getting the School Wide, Non-Classroom, and Classroom System features of SWPBS in place than schools that are in the process of implementing SWPBS but do not also use SWIS. However, the Individual Student System is equally in need of improvement in both SWIS and non-SWIS schools. Administrators and teachers often had differing views on which features have the highest priority for improvement but were in agreement on the importance of improving opportunities for families to learn positive methods of behavior management and of having efficient behavior support teams in schools.

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Figure Captions

Figure 1. School Wide System: Average Scores for SWIS and Non-SWIS Schools

Figure 2. Non-classroom System: Average Scores for SWIS and Non-SWIS Schools

Figure 3. Classroom System: Average Scores for SWIS and Non-SWIS Schools

Figure 4. Individual Student System: Average Scores for SWIS and Non-SWIS Schools

Figure 5. School Wide System: Average Priority for Improvement Scores of All Administrators and Teachers

Figure 6. Non-classroom System: Average Priority for Improvement Scores of All Administrators and Teachers

Figure 7. Classroom System: Average Priority for Improvement Scores of All Administrators and Teachers

Figure 8. Individual Student System: Average Priority for Improvement Scores of All Administrators and Teachers















